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JAMES E. FRASER

‘A Swan from a Raven’: William Wallace, Brucean Propaganda, and *Gesta Annalia* II

There have been any number of studies devoted to the ‘real’ William Wallace, including a veritable explosion of productivity in the wake of recent global publicity afforded his story, which had begun to make its way into English historiography even before his death. Subsequent to these uneven and unfavourable contemporary accounts, the tale of this notable Scot passed through a number of phases of development in the historiography of his native land, and if the ‘real’ Wallace is difficult to detect in most of these later images, it has long been recognised that, as the most recent commentator has put it, ‘the facts are not the reason why he is remembered as a meaningful historical actor’.¹ There can be no doubt, for example, that it was the idealised Wallace image of the time, accepted more or less as history, rather than the historical man himself, which affected and influenced such men as Burns and Wordsworth in their formative years,² which became central to Scottish nationalism, and which, in its most recent silver-screen guise, continues to make a poorer relation of the flesh-and-blood man whose flesh and blood delighted the Smithfield onlookers in August 1305. It is therefore somewhat surprising that this image has received comparatively little attention, and it would seem that an analysis of the development of the Wallace image in Scottish historiography is long overdue.³

This article is concerned with the earliest extant Scottish narrative of Wallace’s career, recorded in the chronicle best referred to as *Gesta Annalia* II (hereafter GA II), following Dauvit Broun’s careful examination of *Gesta Annalia* which demonstrates its independent development

¹ G. Morton, *William Wallace: Man and Myth* (Stroud, 2001), 32. See also E. J. Cowan, ‘The Wallace factor in Scottish history’, in R. Jackson and S. Wood (eds.), *Images of Scotland, The Journal of Scottish Education*, Occasional Paper, Number One (Dundee, 1997), 5–17; G. W. S. Barrow, *Robert Bruce and the Community of the Realm of Scotland* (3rd edn., Edinburgh, 1988), 138.

² E. King, introduction to *Blind Harry’s Wallace: William Hamilton of Gilbertfield* (Edinburgh, 1998), pp. xiii–xv.

³ But see now Morton, *William Wallace*, for a more detailed discussion of medieval developments in the Wallace image, see J. E. Fraser, ‘“Like a swan from a raven”: The historiographical image of William Wallace, 1297–1582’ (Master’s Thesis, University of Guelph, 1999).

and mistaken attribution to John of Fordun.⁴ Its author reports that Wallace, having ‘as it were, raised his head from his den’, killed the English sheriff of Lanark, after which were attracted to him ‘all who were in bitterness of spirit and weighed down beneath the burden of bondage under the unbearable domination of English despotism’, who made him their leader (*dux*). At the head of this band of followers, Wallace is said to have begun attacking the English, defeating them ‘on all sides’, and, ‘gaining strength daily’, to have, ‘in a short time, by force, and by dint of his prowess, brought all the magnates of Scotland under his sway, whether they would or not’. Moreover, our chronicler relates, those magnates who would not conform to his wishes ‘he took and brow-beat, and handed over to custody, until they should utterly submit to his good pleasure’. Thereafter, Wallace is said to have stormed castles and fortified towns containing English garrisons, until an army was sent by Edward I of England to deal with him, led, *GA II* claims, by Hugh Cressingham, the king’s treasurer in Scotland. Interrupting his siege of Dundee castle, Wallace is described as having defeated Cressingham in battle at Stirling Bridge and then, having ‘ejected’ all Englishmen from Scotland, he and his army invaded northern England, burning the whole land as far as Allerdale, before returning safe and sound to Scotland. The chronicle relates that the next year, Wallace and the *communitas Scocie* were defeated in battle by Edward at Falkirk, after which Wallace resigned his guardianship. At that point Wallace seems to disappear from the scene; it is noted later that he was the only person who did not submit to Edward in 1304, and his capture and execution in 1305 appears as a sideline to the main narrative of the beginning of Robert Bruce’s reign.⁵

The authorship of *Gesta Annalia II* remains, at present, a mystery.⁶ Broun has determined that the chronicle was composed around 1363, and that its principal source for the career of William Wallace ‘was not simply a year-by-year chronicle’, suggesting instead that it consisted of extracts from such a chronicle, kept at or near St Andrews, but ‘expanded rather haphazardly with other more discursive material’.⁷ The

⁴ D. Broun, ‘A new look at *Gesta Annalia* attributed to John of Fordun’, in B. Crawford (ed.), *Church, Chronicle and Learning in Medieval and Early Renaissance Scotland: Essays Presented to Donald Watt on the Occasion of the Completion of the Publication of Bower’s ‘Scotichronicon’* (Edinburgh, 1999), 9–30. *Gesta Annalia II* is Broun’s designation (p. 15) for that part of the work after and including the second marriage of Alexander III in 1285, caps. 67–190 of Skene’s edition in W. F. Skene (ed.), *Johannis de Fordun, Chronica Gentis Scotorum* (Edinburgh, 1871–2). Henceforth *Chron. GA II* (Skene) with Skene’s chapter designations.

⁵ The foregoing is a summary of *Chron. GA II* (Skene), 98–116.

⁶ S. Boardman, ‘Chronicle propaganda in fourteenth-century Scotland: Robert the Steward, John of Fordun and the “Anonymous Chronicle”’, *ante*, lxxvi (1997), 23–43, has shown (p. 24) that, whoever he was, the author ‘identified himself (and his intended audience) with the north-eastern Lowlands’. Dr Boardman has now (personal communication) developed further theories about the chronicler’s identity which will, it is hoped, soon reach print.

⁷ Broun, ‘New look at *Gesta Annalia*’, 19. Broun refers to this underlying source as a ‘St Andrews “Chronicle”’.

existence of such a source would seem, at least on the surface, to have important ramifications for the study of Wallace, for it might raise our expectations of the veracity of *GA II*'s material, and so promise to be a great boon to scholars and Wallace enthusiasts alike. However, it must be said that *GA II*'s version of the events of Wallace's lifetime bears only a passing resemblance to the reality, insofar as we can reconstruct it. The Scottish rising of 1297–1304 against the regime established by Edward to provide Scotland with a government of his own devising appears to have owed much to the agency and support of the Scottish clergy, who put their case against the English king's claims before Philip IV of France and the pope, and to have been led largely by men who had opposed the Balliol claim to the throne in the Great Cause, King John's supporters having made up most of the prisoners taken by Edward the previous year. The principal leaders of the resistance included the last two remaining guardians from the interregnum of 1290–92, Robert Wishart, Bishop of Glasgow, and James the Steward, but others emerged in due course, including Wallace, who appears to have been a member of Stewart's feudal following, and Robert Bruce, Earl of Carrick.⁸ Beginning with the status which came with being the Steward's man, in 1297 Wallace embarked upon a remarkable career. With uprisings underway throughout Scotland, he led an attack on Lanark in May, killing its English sheriff, and proceeded in the company of Sir William Douglas, James Stewart's former brother-in-law, to raid Scone and put the English chief justiciar for Scotland to flight. While Wishart, the Steward, Douglas and Bruce, after their so-called 'capitulation' at Irvine in June, discussed a resolution to the situation with the English, Scottish unrest, aided by a sympathetic nobility, was coalescing under two leaders, Andrew Murray, the son of a Moray lord of the same name, in the north and north-east, and Wallace in the south. By the time talks broke down and Wishart and Douglas were imprisoned, Murray and Wallace were drifting together; by the time John Warenne, Earl of Surrey and Edward's governor of Scotland,⁹ entered Scotland with his army, they had joined up. At Stirling Bridge in September, their forces inflicted a humiliating defeat upon Surrey, after which Wallace (for Murray had been badly wounded in the battle) oversaw the invasion and ravaging of the countryside of northern England.¹⁰

Having been instrumental to the rising up until that point, Murray seems to have died in November 1297; meanwhile, Wallace (with Murray

⁸ F. J. Watson, *Under the Hammer: Edward I and Scotland, 1286–1306* (East Linton, 1998), 39, 44–5. A. Young, *Robert the Bruce's Rivals: The Comyns, 1212–1314* (East Linton, 1997), 164–8, adds to the list of Wallace's known co-insurgents. See Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, 81–2, for Wallace's connections with James Stewart.

⁹ Watson, *Under the Hammer*, 41, shows that, in fact, Sir Brian FitzAlan of Bedale had replaced Surrey by August 1297, but the latter had not yet been able officially to relinquish his position by September.

¹⁰ For a detailed analysis of the invasion, which Wallace appears to have been hard-pressed to control, see C. J. McNamee, 'William Wallace's invasion of northern England in 1297', *Northern History*, xxvi (1990), 40–58.

before his death) issued letters, writs and charters, styling himself ‘commander of the army of’, or ‘Guardian of’, Scotland with the ‘consent of the community of the realm’ and ‘in the name of’ King John. While Edward was extricating himself from Flanders, whither he had gone in August 1297, Wallace appears to have been knighted,¹¹ and was presumably also formally recognised by the community of the realm. Edward met Wallace in battle at Falkirk on 22 July 1298, destroying both his army and his credibility; removed from or resigning his position, Wallace led a mission to elicit French support for Scotland in 1299–1300, and probably proceeded from Paris to Rome to join the Scots lobbying for papal favour.¹² In 1303, with the rising petering out in its sixth year, Wallace emerged again among its leaders in the field,¹³ but the fighting spirit of the Scots continued to wane, and the community of the realm finally submitted to Edward’s peace in 1304. Wallace, however, did not submit, presumably because Edward refused to offer him reasonable terms, and he continued to skirmish with English garrisons with a dwindling band of followers while Edward targeted him for capture at all costs. Finally taken in August 1305, William Wallace was dragged from the Tower of London to Smithfield and savagely mutilated and executed after a sensational trial; his quarters were hung at Newcastle, Berwick, Stirling and Perth, and his head stuck on London Bridge.

This, then, is the ‘historical’ Wallace as best as can be determined, and there is no doubt that he bears some small resemblance to the Wallace of *GA II*. Broun has noted the existence of an independent witness to the chronicle’s contemporary source material in a ‘summary chronicle’ which records the following information for the period 1296–1305:

Anno 1296 capta est villa Berwici per regem Anglie iii Kal. Aprilis.
 Eodem anno xi Kal. Maii ejecti sunt omnes Anglici de Scotia.
 Eodem anno v. Kal. Maii commissum est bellum de Dunbarre.
 Anno 1297 commissum est bellum pontis de Strivelyne.
 Eodem anno Willelmus Walise hyemavit in Anglia a festo omnium
 sanctorum usque ad natale domini et per ipsum eodem anno ejecti
 fuerunt omnes Anglici de Scotia.
 Anno 1298 Kal. Aug. commissum est bellum de Faw Kirk.
 Anno 1302 vi Kal. Aug. commissum est bellum de Roslone.
 Anno 1303 Rex Anglie peragravit planas et montana Scocie.
 Eodem anno communitas Scocie reversa est ad pacem regis Anglie.
 Anno 1304 rex Anglie obsedit castellum de Strywelyne.
 Anno 1305 interfectus est Willelmus Walaise.¹⁴

¹¹ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, 96, suggests that it was Bruce who knighted Wallace.

¹² *Ibid.*, 110–16.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁴ Edinburgh University Library MS 27 (‘Aberdeen Cathedral Breviary’); the ‘summary chronicle’ is transcribed by C. R. Borland (ed.), *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Western Medieval Manuscripts in Edinburgh University Library* (Edinburgh, 1916), 329–32. For its relationship with *GA II*, see Broun, ‘New look at *Gesta Annalia*’, 18–19.

If this laconic list of events provides some indication of the contemporaneous skeleton that supported *GA* II's more fleshed-out account, it serves to explain why there is a certain amount of chronological and other agreement between *GA* II and the contemporary English chronicles of Lanercost and Guisborough. The Augustinian priory of Lanercost in Cumberland, with lands and interests on both sides of the Border, was ideally situated for the collection of information pertaining to the rising, during the period contemporary with which its chronicle was being kept current;¹⁵ its anonymous chronicle, having described him as 'a certain bloody man ... who had formerly been a chief of brigands in Scotland', says that Wallace then 'assemble[d] the *populus* in his support'.¹⁶ The Augustinians of Guisborough were more distant from the theatre of war, but thanks to the patronage of the Bruces, who had founded Guisborough in 1120 when Robert Bruce was a local baron, they were provided with lands and interests further north in Annandale and Durham which were, like the holdings of Lanercost, vulnerable to predation from both sides of the conflict.¹⁷ Walter of Guisborough compiled his chronicle in the first decade of the fourteenth century, and appears to have been well-informed about the rising through one central written record, supported by other material which reached him either in documentary form or by word of mouth;¹⁸ he, having similarly characterised Wallace as a brigand, records that he then 'gathered to him all of the outlaws (*exulantes*) and acted as if he were their prince',¹⁹ and depicts him later as 'drawing the *populus* together'.²⁰ Even the St Albans chronicle of William Rishanger, at a much greater remove from the events it describes,²¹ records these two stages of Wallace's rise to power, introducing him as 'an archer of low-birth and poor descent and education who earned his livelihood with arrow and quiver', and stating that 'Scots from the smallest to the greatest adhered to him, on account of which a certain outstanding earl (*comes*) of that nation girded the said William with the knight's belt, making a knight of a robber, just like a swan from a raven'.²²

Something of this progression in Wallace's career can also be found in *GA* II, where Wallace attacks Lanark, seemingly on his own, and then attracts wider support before escalating the level of his resistance.

¹⁵ J. Wilson, introduction to H. Maxwell (ed.), *The Chronicle of Lanercost, 1272-1346* (Glasgow, 1913), pp. xvii, xxix-xxx. The priory held lands in Carlisle, Dumfries, Hexham and Newcastle.

¹⁶ *Chronicon de Lanercost* (Maitland Club, 1839), 190.

¹⁷ H. Rothwell (ed.), *The Chronicle of Walter of Guisborough* [*Chron. Guisborough*], previously edited as *the chronicle of Walter of Hemingford or Hemingburgh* (London, 1957), pp. xi-xii.

¹⁸ *Chron. Guisborough*, p. xxvii. The chronicle includes contemporary letters and mentions that an English messenger detained by Wallace for ransom stayed for a time at Guisborough 'and described his ordeal in great detail' (pp. 296-7).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 294.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 299.

²¹ References to *Chronica Willelmi Rishanger* are to the transcription in J. Stevenson (ed.), *Documents Illustrative of Sir William Wallace, his Life and Times* (Maitland Club, 1841), §1.

²² Stevenson, *Wallace Docs.*, 8.

Similarly, where Guisborough goes on to say that ‘the *communitas terre* followed him as their leader and ruler’,²³ and Rishanger says that the Scots ‘elected by the assent of all the *communis* someone of ignoble descent called William Wallace as their leader and champion’,²⁴ GA II suggests that the Scottish nation became united behind Wallace, and refers to his followers and supporters at Falkirk (although not any earlier) as the *communitas Scocie*. Whether or not Walter of Guisborough and William Rishanger appreciated the difference between *populus* and *communitas* in the Scottish political context, about which there is room for doubt,²⁵ it seems clear that where it seems more or less to correspond to information found in contemporary English chronicles and the ‘summary chronicle’, GA II is likely to have followed some source of reasonable accuracy. It is true that where GA II refers to Wallace’s followers in the intermediate stage of this process as those ‘weighed down’ by ‘English despotism’, the English chronicles portray Wallace as having been the fomentor and cultivator of unrest among the outlaws and common people of Scotland – unrest which was not necessarily forthcoming on its own – but in both cases such a difference of opinion is understandable.

At particular odds with both the historical events of the rising and the testimony of the contemporary English chronicles, however, are GA II’s descriptions of Wallace having ‘brought all the magnates of Scotland under his sway, whether they would or not’, and, as we shall examine more closely later, of his having been betrayed by particular magnates at Falkirk. The veritable *coup d’état* described by GA II, in which Wallace subjects magnates to physical force and imprisonment ‘until they should utterly submit to his good pleasure’, appears to know nothing of the instrumental leadership that John Comyn, Wishart and the Steward seem to have provided the rising, giving no indication of the support that we know Wallace received from Douglas, and making only the slightest of mentions of Andrew Murray without acknowledging his activities in the north. In fact, despite his access to whatever reliable contemporary information about the rising had been recorded in the St Andrews chronicle, the author of GA II emerges as distinctly less reliable in his testimony than the contemporary northern English chronicles of what may be called the ‘chief of brigands’ group, steeped as their authors may have been in war-spawned enmity towards their Scottish enemies.

The role played in the rising by Wallace, described by Guisborough as ‘a common brigand’,²⁶ appears much less clear and much more complex

²³ *Chron. Guisborough*, 299. The translation is Barrow’s (*Robert Bruce*, 85).

²⁴ Stevenson, *Wallace Docs.*, 8.

²⁵ While the political language of England made a distinction between *les hauts hommes* and *la commune*, in Scotland *communitas regni Scotie* was a blanket term encompassing both of these groups, and this was not always appreciated by English observers. See Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, 16, and A. A. M. Duncan, ‘The community of the realm of Scotland and Robert Bruce’, *ante*, xlv (1966), 190. Guisborough may, however, have got his *communitas terre* from the reference to the *communitas regni* in Wallace’s letter.

²⁶ *Chron. Guisborough*, 294.

in these two chronicles. According to Lanercost, the leaders of the rising were Wishart ('ever foremost in treason') and the Steward, and it was under these two men, who feared 'to openly break their pledged faith to the king', that Wallace operated.²⁷ This allegation that Wallace's position within the rising was subordinate is likely to have been more than a baseless accusation intended to rob Wallace of his rightful place in history, for we have written evidence from later in the rising of Wallace being exhorted by the bishop of St Andrews, William Lamberton, to make war upon the English;²⁸ there is no particular reason to doubt that Wishart used similar devices to muster the resistance of 1297. In other words, while a measure of bias-driven fact-sifting is likely to have occurred among contemporary English observers, for the most part, their treatments of William Wallace seem to have been based in understood facts, and influenced by their nature, and it is misleading to speak of these accounts generally as being 'hysterical' or 'malignant caricatures',²⁹ or indeed to assume the conspiratorial attitude of a recent commentator that they 'attempted to destroy [Wallace's] memory and reputation'.³⁰

Further evidence of Wallace's subordination, or at the very least of his co-operation with and reliance upon the help of powerful allies, appears in the Guisborough chronicle, which describes how Wallace joined Douglas on campaign through eastern Scotland near the beginning of the rising, attacking the English justiciar at Perth and driving the English south of the Forth.³¹ Walter of Guisborough does not explicitly state that Wallace served Douglas, but neither does he imply the opposite, and the partnership of these two figures seems to be implied. Guisborough goes on to create the impression that Wallace was not the sole leader of the rising by describing how Wallace was gathering an army while Wishart and Douglas were pretending to treat with Surrey at Berwick after surrendering to him at Irvine, while both 'chief of brigands' chronicles record that while the Steward (Guisborough adds Malcolm Earl of Lennox) was falsely treating with Surrey before the battle of Stirling Bridge, Wallace was preparing the Scottish army for the fight to come.³² In addition, Guisborough includes two letters issued by the leaders of the invasion of northern England, one of which names only Andrew Murray as its author and the other of which names him before Wallace, creating the impression that Murray was understood to have been the man in command.³³

On the whole, then, the 'chief of brigands' chronicles imply, and in some cases state outright, that during the rising, Wallace was complicit

²⁷ *Chron. Lanercost*, 190.

²⁸ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, 128–9.

²⁹ J. M. Ross, *Scottish History and Literature to the Period of the Reformation* (Glasgow, 1884), 71, 75.

³⁰ King, *Wallace*, p. xx.

³¹ *Chron. Guisborough*, 295.

³² *Chron. Guisborough*, 299–300; *Chron. Lanercost*, 190.

³³ *Chron. Guisborough*, 305–6.

with, and something of an instrument of, these important Scottish leaders. Whatever the exact nature of this situation, it appears to have changed by the summer of 1298, for in its description of the battle of Falkirk, the Lanercost chronicle creates little doubt about the eminence of Wallace's position, stating that the Scots met Edward 'with all their forces at Falkirk, William Wallace aforesaid being their commander'.³⁴ Guisborough, whose portrayal of Wallace generally depicts him as somewhat more independent in his actions than he appears in the Lanercost chronicle, is not so explicit about this, but there can be little doubt that he believed Wallace to have led the Scots at Falkirk, describing a number of prior moments in which Wallace appears as an independent actor. According to Guisborough, in the first few months of the rising Wallace was responsible for selecting particular forms of violence to be done against English clerics and women in Scotland, for capturing English messengers and holding them for ransom, and for ignoring the sanctity of churches, allowing his followers to drag their clergy out to be murdered.³⁵ As the battle of Stirling Bridge approached, according to Guisborough, 'the multitude of Scots following him as a general or prince was growing ... [and] even the retainers of the magnates were adhering to him'.³⁶ This chronicle also describes Wallace as having organised and led the successful Scottish charge at Stirling Bridge,³⁷ although it is less clear whether Wallace was more than the leader of one part of the host, while the Lanercost chronicle accuses him only of the crime of flaying the corpse of Hugh Cressingham in order 'to make from it a baldrick for his sword',³⁸ leaving his place in the order of battle uncertain.

The impression is therefore created by these two northern English chronicles of Wallace's relationship with the Scottish magnates as having initially been one of subordination, followed by his assumption of a more independent and dominant, but still co-operative, position, culminating in his exercising command of the Scots at Falkirk. The process by which Wallace's status appears to have evolved is not clearly described in either chronicle, but Wallace's complicity with the magnates at Stirling Bridge appears to be the last incidence of his subordination to them in both texts, with the invasion of northern England, thanks in part to Guisborough's treatment of his evidence, appearing to be the first incidence of his independence. Despite his inclusion of the above-mentioned letters of protection which appear to name Murray as the leader of the invasion of northern England, Guisborough nevertheless states in its narrative that Wallace was, *scilicet*, the leader of the invasion,

³⁴ *Chron. Lanercost*, 191.

³⁵ *Chron. Guisborough*, 296–7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 299.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 300–3.

³⁸ *Chron. Lanercost*, 190. Cressingham was Surrey's lieutenant at Stirling Bridge, and the leader of the detachment annihilated in the battle, and was not the leader of the English on the day as GA II supposed. *Chron. Guisborough*, 303, records this event but does not directly name Wallace as the perpetrator.

and records that it was Wallace who threatened the townspeople of Carlisle, who spared the monastery at Hexham and who punished those in his army who ignored this prohibition of violence.³⁹ As we have seen, while this aspect of the contemporary English chronicles contains a good deal of trustworthy history, it clearly bears little resemblance to the situation described by *GA* II, in which Wallace appears as the only notable Scottish leader from the very beginning of the rising until Falkirk, with the exception of John Comyn Earl of Buchan, whose ineffectual attack on Carlisle in 1296 is noted just before the outset of the Wallace story.⁴⁰ This is a striking difference, and it is difficult to believe that *GA* II's innovative version of these events was taken from the contemporaneous chronicle that it seems to have shared as a source with the 'summary chronicle'; it seems more likely to represent, at least in part, some later interpretation of Wallace's early career that can only be described as dubious.

We are afforded a further glimpse of the kinds of sources that were available in Scotland at the time of the composition of *GA* II in *Scalacronica*, the 'Ladder Chronicle' of Sir Thomas Gray of Heton, the son of an English knight of the same name who fought for King Edward in Scotland during the rising and was so badly wounded fighting Wallace himself at Lanark in May 1297 that he was stripped of his accoutrements and left to die.⁴¹ The younger Sir Thomas was himself captured by the Scots a generation later and imprisoned at Edinburgh, where around 1360 he composed his chronicle, which has been classified as 'chivalrous' historiography, a continental development intended to provide young knights with examples of heroic adventures and deeds to be emulated.⁴² In addition to what appear to be reminiscences of his father's, Gray had access to Guisborough,⁴³ which suggests that the *GA* II chronicler, who wrote in this same general period, may have had access to this chronicle as well, but there is nothing to indicate that he used it. Like Guisborough, Gray reports that Wallace was 'at hand in the order of battle' and led the decisive charge at Stirling Bridge, but that he was explicitly not the leader there, which tends to follow the 'chief of brigands' line with respect to Wallace's initial subordination and his co-operation with other leaders.⁴⁴ Similarly, *Scalacronica*'s descriptions of the invasion of England and the Scottish army at Falkirk as having been led by Wallace are compatible with the views of the contemporary

³⁹ *Chron. Guisborough*, 304–6. McNamee, 'William Wallace's invasion', 47, suggests that Hexham was spared because the canons agreed to pay protection money to Wallace.

⁴⁰ *Chron. GA* II (Skene), 97.

⁴¹ H. Maxwell (ed.), *The Scalacronica, The Reigns of Edward I, Edward II and Edward III as recorded by Sir Thomas Grey* (Glasgow, 1907; reprinted Lampeter, 2000), 18.

⁴² J. Taylor, *English Historical Literature in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford, 1987), 155–6.

⁴³ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, 140. Interestingly, Gray, *Scalacronica* (Maxwell), 18, places the invasion of England before the battle of Stirling Bridge; his misconception about this may be due in part to the faulty memory of his injured father, who was removed from the events of 1297.

⁴⁴ *Scalacronica* (Maxwell), 19.

English chroniclers of Wallace's rise to prominence.⁴⁵ It is true that Gray departs from these works in noticing Wallace's attack upon Lanark, which he describes as a surprise night assault, and the death of its sheriff,⁴⁶ an event noted with less detail by *GA II*, but it is clear from the text that Gray's information is derived from his father's eyewitness account of this event, which tells us little about the nature of *GA II*'s source.

Gray's statement that 'William Wallace was chosen by *la comune* of Scotland as leader to raise war against the English' is a view much more similar to that taken by *GA II*,⁴⁷ but there are significant differences, and in fact, *Scalacronica* is here more reminiscent of Rishanger's chronicle, which unlike *GA II* gives no indication of any programme of coercion of the magnates undertaken by Wallace. Moreover, *Scalacronica*'s statement regarding Falkirk that 'it was said long after that William Wallace had brought them to the revel if they would have danced', would seem to clinch the point that Gray made use either of Rishanger's chronicle, which records that Wallace 'said in his native tongue, *Hii have pult ou into a gamen, hoppet yif ye kunnet*, as if he had said, "I have brought you into the pit and ring, dance if you can so as to be saved"', or else of Rishanger's source.⁴⁸ Again, this suggests the possibility that the *GA II* chronicler also had access to such information, but his chronicle appears to know nothing of this speech or a number of other details preserved by Rishanger. On the other hand, Rishanger appears to have relied in part upon information gleaned from the record of Wallace's trial in 1305 and the list of charges levelled against him there, including the raising of a mob, the calling of parliaments and gatherings, and the persuading of Scottish prelates, earls and barons to adhere to him and keep faith with the French, in addition to a list of atrocities.⁴⁹ This list of charges includes the killing of the sheriff of Lanark and the attacking of homes, cities and castles, both of which appear in the initial chapter of the Wallace story in *GA II*; it therefore seems possible that a copy of the details of Wallace's trial formed the basis of *GA II*'s innovative account of Wallace, but it is notable that the trial record makes no mention of any war waged against Scottish magnates, and this, along with other differences between them, suggests that *GA II* relied not upon an account of Wallace's trial *per se*, but rather on an intermediate source that had itself made use of such an account but had also made significant changes in generating its version of Wallace's rise to power.

In the final analysis, then, it seems safe to conclude that while *GA II* contains some basic contemporary facts, it would be unwise to treat the totality of its depiction of William Wallace's rise to prominence as a contemporary one. What it seems to represent instead, to borrow Broun's

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 18–21.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 21; Stevenson, *Wallace Docs.*, 10.

⁴⁹ Stevenson, *Wallace Docs.*, 191–2.

phrase, is the compiler's use of 'more discursive material', the nature of which is not immediately clear. In this regard, it is very interesting that, while the *coup d'état* passage from *GA* II is unsatisfying as an accurate representation of William Wallace, it seems to summarise neatly the career of Robert Bruce between 1306 and 1314 – the period of his own rise to prominence in Scotland. In 1306, Bruce became a usurper by assassinating his principal political rival, seizing a number of Scottish castles, and having himself enthroned as king of Scots at Scone. Opposition to this new king in Scotland was considerable, and, taking arms against his enemies, he compelled hostile magnates to do homage at sword-point as he and his supporters continued to capture their castles.⁵⁰ After having been defeated by the English, harried by his Scottish enemies and forced into exile, Robert returned to Scotland in 1307 to begin a campaign of guerrilla warfare against both his English and his Scottish opponents. He was buoyed up by growing support among both his common and his aristocratic subjects, attributable in part to a programme of propaganda disseminated, to use a contemporary metaphor, by his 'false preachers'.⁵¹ Watson summarises the foregoing process as follows:

most of the country's natural leaders were eventually 'persuaded' of the 'legitimacy' of his actions not because of a genuine belief in the 'rightness' of his cause, but rather as a result of the judicious application of brute force, together with exemplary skills of diplomacy and propaganda.⁵²

This 'brute force' was most extensively employed in such areas as Galloway in 1307–8 and Argyll and the north-east in 1308, the strongholds of sympathy for his principal opponents. Diplomacy and propaganda, on the other hand, were weapons that continued to prove effective after Bannockburn in 1314 when, his position secure, Robert could, along with his 'false preachers', turn his attention towards what must have seemed a long-standing need to produce an officially-sanctioned version of the rather dubious story of his kingship to date.

There have been a number of recent studies that have sought to examine the extent to which Bruce made use of various forms of propaganda both to justify and to solidify his capture of the kingship of Scots.⁵³ The most famous example of such self-aggrandising propaganda is the so-called Declaration of Arbroath,⁵⁴ as presented in this famous document, Robert's legitimacy as king was based upon four provisions: (1) the providence of God; (2) his being the rightful successor based upon

⁵⁰ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, 148–56.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁵² F. Watson, 'The enigmatic lion: Scotland, kingship and national identity in the Wars of Independence', in D. Broun, R. J. Finlay and M. Lynch (eds.), *Image and Identity: The Making and Re-making of Scotland Through the Ages* (Edinburgh, 1998), 18–37, at 28.

⁵³ For considerations of Bruce's propaganda and its effects, see R. J. Goldstein, *The Matter of Scotland* (Lincoln, NE, and London, 1993), 79–103; Watson, 'Enigmatic lion', *passim*; Young, *The Comyns*, 1–8.

⁵⁴ Excerpts from the Declaration are from A. A. M. Duncan (ed.), *The Nation of Scots and the Declaration of Arbroath* (London, 1970), 35–6.

the 'laws and customs' of Scotland; (3) his having been the instrument of Scottish freedom, acting 'that his people and heritage might be delivered out of the hands of enemies'; and (4) the 'due consent and assent' of Scotland, which could, and would, be revoked if Robert ever sought to undermine the freedom of the kingdom.⁵⁵ As we have seen, however, the historical reality seems to be something much more akin to GA II's description of Wallace's *coup d'état*: it had been Bruce, after all, who (to paraphrase GA II), 'gaining strength daily', had 'overthrown the English on all sides' and 'by force and by dint of his prowess brought all the magnates of Scotland under his sway'. It was also Bruce who would later claim, as the Declaration of Arbroath reveals, that he had done such things, including seizing control of the kingdom, 'that his people and heritage might be delivered out of the hands of enemies',⁵⁶ a phrase eerily similar to GA II's statement that Wallace had acted in the name of 'quickly and thoroughly freeing his country and overthrowing the enemy'.⁵⁷ It is interesting that GA II does not trouble itself to pause and justify Wallace's *coup d'état*, noting his motivation as a matter of fact rather than of legitimisation. Instead, the justified nature of Wallace's capture, coercion and imprisonment of magnates would seem to be understood, and based upon his acting on behalf of 'all who were in bitterness of spirit and weighed down beneath the burden of bondage', and his goal of 'thoroughly freeing his country'.

These details seem to recall the basic political theory that underlies the Declaration of Arbroath; in fact, the *coup d'état* passage may be seen as an illustration of Bruce's political theory put into practice, with Wallace in the role occupied later by Robert himself. Wallace is provided with two of the four provisions assigned by the Declaration to Robert Bruce in order to establish the latter's legitimacy: having acted (a) with 'the due consent and assent of all of us' and (b) in order 'that his people and his heritage might be delivered out of the hands of enemies'. It has been argued that these were in fact the principal foundations upon which Bruce, the Declaration aside, based his own claims to legitimacy.⁵⁸ Further illustration of this political theory seems to occur in GA II's reference to Wallace's suppression of 'the magnates as did not thankfully obey his commands'. The implication here is that these magnates resisted Wallace's quest to fight for the freedom of Scotland; they therefore assume the role assigned by the Declaration to the wayward king who might 'seek to make us or our kingdom subject to the king of England'. As even a king could be removed and disinherited for this reason, much as Bruce disinherited Balliol and a number of other

⁵⁵ For a recent study of the political theory embodied in the Declaration of Arbroath, see E.J. Cowan, 'Identity, freedom and the Declaration of Arbroath', in Broun, Finlay and Lynch, *Image and Identity*, 38–68.

⁵⁶ This justification is discussed by Cowan, 'Identity, freedom and the Declaration of Arbroath', 52–7.

⁵⁷ *Chron. GA II* (Skene), 98.

⁵⁸ Watson, 'Enigmatic lion', 30.

opponents, it was therefore only proper, according to this political theory, that the people of Scotland, under Wallace, fought 'to drive them [the wayward magnates] out as their enemies and subverters of their own right and the people's' and having made 'some other man who was able to defend us [namely Wallace himself] their king,' or, as it happened, their *dux* and sole guardian.

It is possible to read too much into the small number of extant sources, albeit important ones, that speak of Bruce's propaganda programme, and there must remain room for doubt that we can ever come to terms with the fullness of it when we cannot know how representative a sample of it survives. At the same time, however, it is notable that the promulgation of political propaganda in the form of chronicle-writing was well-established in Scotland by the later fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, and Boardman has shown that the *GA* II chronicler himself was a fair hand at it, denigrating Robert the Steward as a potential heir to the throne to please Bruce's son, David II, who was planning to secure a marriage alliance with Edward III that would have prevented the Steward from succeeding him.⁵⁹ The existence of such a tradition of chronicle propaganda, along with the striking similarities between *GA* II's depiction of Wallace's *coup d'état* and the 'historical' early career and propaganda of Robert Bruce, begs the question of whether the author of *GA* II relied upon a source for his innovative treatment of Wallace that was influenced by Brucean chronicle propaganda. Certainly there are no explicit attempts to draw any connection between Bruce and Wallace, in contrast to the later Wallace stories of *Scotichronicon* and Hary's *Wallace*, where Wallace meets Bruce at Falkirk and is made the impetus that motivated him to forsake his treacherous ways and undertake a more patriotic career, so that Wallace emerges as ultimately responsible for the liberation of Scotland which Bruce finally achieved.⁶⁰ Something more subtle appears to be at work in *GA* II, where the dubious actual elements of the early career of Robert Bruce are mirrored in the fabricated *coup d'état* of William Wallace. This is not likely to be an accident; by portraying Wallace as the single *dux* of the rising from its beginnings in 1297 until his defeat at Falkirk in 1298, which, as has been stated, has no basis in fact, someone must have intended to liken Wallace to the historical Robert Bruce.

Without further information, the motivation underlying such an appropriation of the image of William Wallace can only be guessed at. It would seem to provide Bruce with an alleged precedent by which his activities might be justified, and to suggest that Robert and Wallace were kindred spirits, fighting what was essentially the same struggle, for what

⁵⁹ Boardman, 'Chronicle propaganda', 24–5.

⁶⁰ D. E. R. Watt (ed.), *Scotichronicon* by Walter Bower (Aberdeen, 1987–98), vi, 94–7; M. P. McDiarmid (ed.), *Hary's Wallace* (Scottish Text Society, 1968), 57. Hary adds an episode in which the two men meet again, affording Bruce the opportunity to express his debt to Wallace in person. For a discussion of the images of William Wallace embodied in *Scotichronicon* and the *Wallace*, see Fraser, 'Like a swan from a raven', 75–116.

were essentially the same reasons, against what was essentially the same foe. Perhaps the architect of this likeness hoped to show that Bruce was no greater a villain or less worthy a candidate to lead the Scots than Wallace had been, and no less worthy of the adulation of those who remembered Wallace fondly. It would seem important to note, however, that in the combination of such propaganda with the Declaration of Arbroath, Robert emerges as the better candidate to lead Scotland; GA II assigns to Wallace only two of the Declaration's four provisions for the legitimacy of Robert, never speaking directly of Wallace having had 'divine providence' (although it is claimed that the Scottish triumph at Stirling Bridge was the result of divine power)⁶¹ or affording him 'right according to our laws and customs' to hold power. Robert may have been loathe to acknowledge his own indiscretions and questionable acts, but he was aware of them; by making Wallace equally 'guilty' of such things, the propaganda underlying GA II renders them as undamaging to Robert's reputation as they had become to Wallace's. Put another way, to speak ill of the details of Robert's rise to power was, according to the parallel, to speak ill of Wallace; there can have been no more expedient way for Robert to have secured acceptance, especially among the people who remembered Wallace with favour, than to have suggested that he was no more guilty of questionable deeds than was the man who had led the decisive charge at Stirling Bridge.

An antagonistic relationship between Wallace and the magnates of Scotland, leading to the betrayal of Wallace by the latter, is sometimes taken for granted,⁶² but this appears to be another innovative and unsubstantiated aspect of the Wallace image promulgated by GA II. It appears nowhere in the contemporary English chronicles where, as we have seen, Wallace is portrayed as someone who co-operated and associated amicably with men like Bishop Wishart and James the Steward, and even subordinated himself to them. Further south, chroniclers like Rishanger, Matthew of Westminster and the anonymous chronicler of Bury St Edmunds seem not to have differed greatly in their perceptions from their northern counterparts, except that they were rather more interested in underlining Wallace's villainy as a vicious invader of their country and a fomenter of unrest than in the details of his political relationships and position.⁶³ There is, as we have seen, little suggestion of

⁶¹ *Chron. GA II* (Skene), 99.

⁶² Like the GA II chronicler, A. Fisher, *William Wallace* (Edinburgh, 1986), perceives an aristocratic 'fifth column' that 'had to be eliminated' by Wallace (p. 46), believes that those nobles who supported Wallace did so unwillingly (pp. 75–6), and characterises the English Falkirk campaign as capable of defeating Wallace only because of treachery (pp. 77–83).

⁶³ Stevenson, *Wallace Docs.*, 6. Rishanger was able to speak at some length about Stirling Bridge. He does not mention Wallace, but makes him the leader of the invasion of England (p. 9). The anonymous *Chronica Buriensis* [*Chron. Bury*], A. Gransden (ed.), *The Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds, 1212–1301* (Edinburgh, 1964), discusses (pp. 141–2) the rising and the invasion of England, ascribing the former to the absence of Edward and recording that Cressingham was beheaded, failing to mention Wallace or even the location of this incident.

coercion of the magnates on the part of Wallace in Rishanger's claim that the Scots 'elected ... William Wallace as their leader and champion', which allowed the chronicler, in an interesting twist on *GA* II's focus upon Wallace as a solitary figure of resistance, to assign sole blame for the rising and its ultimate consequences for the Scots to him alone, stating that as a result of his 'falsehoods and fraudulences ... the brutal suppression of the Scots was undertaken', along with 'his [own] destruction and the ignominious harvesting of all Scotland'.⁶⁴ All of this has the distinct sound of having been written after the fact, reflecting the final outcome of the matter in which Wallace had by 1305 become the symbol and scapegoat of the rising.

The anonymous Bury chronicler, who seems generally to have been badly informed about the rising, recorded that the Scottish invasion of northern England was 'led by a certain Maleis accompanied by William Wallace', demonstrating further the perception among his English contemporaries that Wallace and other Scottish leaders, in this case perhaps Malise of Strathearn,⁶⁵ worked in partnership with one another, as we know they did. In fact, it is interesting that the English chroniclers sometimes imply, or indeed state outright, that it was Wallace who had treacherous tendencies towards the magnates of Scotland, rather than the opposite. He is accused by the Lanercost chronicler of breaking agreements made with English garrisons that had surrendered to the Scots,⁶⁶ while Matthew of Westminster alleges that at Falkirk, Wallace, 'seeing that he could not resist such a mighty force ... fled from the fight, forsaking his people to the massacre of the sword',⁶⁷ information which also came to Rishanger, who noted that Wallace made his famous speech, quoted above, 'to compel the multitude of footmen to enter the fight', but that 'he however fled away, not as a chief but as an absconder'.⁶⁸ It would appear to have been through Rishanger or his source that Sir Thomas Gray became aware of these details, recording in *Scalacronica* that 'William Wallace, who was on horseback, fled with the other Scottish lords who were present'.⁶⁹

As we have seen in the case of *GA* II's record of Wallace's *coup d'état*, the silence of the contemporary English chronicles with regard to his having suffered from the treachery of Scottish magnates suggests that no contemporary Scottish chronicle contained such information.⁷⁰ It has

⁶⁴ Stevenson, *Wallace Docs.*, 9.

⁶⁵ Although Gransden, *Chron. Bury*, 142, note 3, suggests that 'Maleis' is somehow a rendering of Andrew Murray's name, Barrow suggests more plausibly that Malise Earl of Strathearn took part in the invasion (*Robert Bruce*, 93).

⁶⁶ *Chron. Lanercost*, 191.

⁶⁷ Stevenson, *Wallace Docs.*, 27.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 10. It is interesting that Westminster, like the Bury chronicler, does not mention Wallace or his alleged treachery there in his account of Falkirk itself, and it seems likely that he relied upon two different sources for his accounts of Falkirk and of Wallace's deeds there – in the latter case, perhaps a record of Wallace's trial.

⁶⁹ *Scalacronica* (Maxwell), 21.

⁷⁰ Langtoft's unique placement of Wallace among the infantry at Falkirk, and not among the fleeing cavalry, is of dubious historical value (Stevenson, *Wallace Docs.*, 82).

been suggested instead that GA II's contention that Wallace had legitimately held the sovereignty of Scotland by vigorously rendering its magnates his lawful subordinates preserves an item of Brucean propaganda, and it is possible that his familiarity with this claim convinced the chronicler that any attested differences between Wallace and the magnates was treachery on the part of the latter. However, the two claims – that Wallace legitimately wrested power away from the magnates and that the magnates then betrayed him – seem far more likely to have been linked at the outset, so that the idea of the betrayal of Wallace, including GA II's explicit description of Wallace's capture as an act of treachery (recorded dispassionately by the English accounts),⁷¹ is likely to be more Brucean fabrication. It would, after all, have been impossible to utilise the political theory of the Declaration of Arbroath to justify Wallace's *coup d'état* unless the magnates were depicted as hostile to Wallace. Furthermore, as with the legitimacy case already examined, the notion that Wallace and the magnates did not get along corresponds conveniently with the known facts about the career of Robert Bruce, who was opposed originally by much of the Scottish nobility, and who may, as Watson has argued, have been keen to create the perception that the Scottish fighting spirit in the struggle for independence had been 'the product of a mass, rather than an elite, effort'.⁷²

The sparse nature of the sources makes certainty impossible, but the parallels between GA II's innovative story of the rise and betrayal of William Wallace and the nature of such Brucean propaganda as survives suggests that someone sympathetic to Bruce produced a carefully considered version of the story of Wallace, based perhaps upon the record of Wallace's trial, in order to make that story illustrative of the legitimacy and propriety of Robert's violent seizure of the Scottish throne in 1306 and his subsequent campaign against all who opposed him. It would appear to have been from this material that the GA II chronicler expanded upon the annalistic information he found in the contemporary St Andrews chronicle, the nature of which can be appreciated from the 'summary chronicle'. Interestingly, it is possible that Sir Thomas Gray was aware of something like this version of Wallace's story, recording in *Scalacronica* that before Stirling Bridge, Wishart and Douglas assured the English 'that they were no parties to the rising of William Wallace, albeit they had been adherents of his previously'.⁷³ It is difficult to know how this should be interpreted, for although Gray may follow Rishanger's idea that Wallace was chosen to lead the Scots in war, he is also explicit that Wallace was not their leader at Stirling Bridge. It is perhaps preferable to interpret 'adherents' as 'allies', rather than as 'subordinates', since to do otherwise would render Gray's chronicle the only one of English authorship in which Wallace's magnatial 'adherents'

⁷¹ *Chron. GA II* (Skene), 116.

⁷² Watson, 'Enigmatic lion', 31.

⁷³ *Scalacronica* (Maxwell), 20.

appear to take a contrary course to him, for *Scalacronica* does not preserve the claims of Guisborough and the Lanercost chronicle (which has the Steward in the role of Douglas and Wishart) that at this meeting the Scottish leaders were being insincere with the English as part of a great ruse. On the other hand, one might argue that Gray chose to leave this qualifying information out of his chronicle because something – perhaps something approximating the putative Brucean source of *GA* II – had given him the impression that Wishart and Douglas were acting in a treacherous fashion in this episode. In the end, we cannot be sure of either interpretation.

It is in the light of possible Brucean manipulation of the sources that we should examine the description of the battle of Falkirk in *GA* II, the episode in which betrayal by the magnates has always figured most prominently and insidiously in the Wallace story. As we have seen, treachery seems indeed to have been associated with the Scottish defeat from the outset, with English chroniclers accusing Wallace himself of having forsaken the Scottish army there. Even if these accusations are disregarded, to the Scottish observer, for whom Wallace's activities in northern England were clearly not perceived as the atrocities they were in the English accounts, the disaster at Falkirk remained the greatest blot upon Wallace's reputation. If we accept that the author of *GA* II had access to a Brucean version of Wallace's story, it emerges that the greatest service of the architect of this source to William Wallace, though it was almost certainly a by-product of his agenda rather than a principal concern, may have been to rehabilitate Wallace in the story of his darkest hour, by blaming his fallibility upon the treachery of the Comyns. Having noted beforehand that Edward's army at Falkirk included some Scottish magnates, *GA* II offers the following explanation for the defeat:

on account of the ill-will begotten of the spring of envy which the Comyns had conceived towards the said William [Wallace], they, with their accomplices, forsook the field and escaped unhurt. On learning their spiteful deed, the aforesaid William, wishing to save himself and his, hastened to flee by another road. But alas! Through the pride and burning envy of both, the noble community of Scotland lay wretchedly overthrown throughout hill and dale, mountain and plain And it is remarkable that we seldom, if ever, read of the Scots being overcome by the English unless through the envy of lords or the treachery and deceit of the natives, taking them over to the other side.⁷⁴

Accepting, as the English chronicles allege, that Wallace fled the battle, this passage makes the point moot by implicating the Comyns in the more significant treachery. A striking element here is the mention of 'the pride and burning envy of both', referring to the Comyns and their accomplices on one hand and to Wallace on the other. In Wyntoun's later chronicle, this suggestion that Wallace was capable of 'pride and

⁷⁴ *Chron. GA* II (Skene), 101.

burning envy' does not appear;⁷⁵ perhaps Wyntoun, writing some sixty years later for a popular audience in its own language, chose not to portray Wallace in this way in deference to popular mythology.

According to GA II, then, the undeniable villains of Falkirk were the Comyn family; theirs is the only family mentioned by name as having betrayed Wallace, with one important exception which will be dealt with below. The family is further denigrated in the subsequent chapter, where they are singled out as the reason for Wallace's resignation of the guardianship, something which may, like Falkirk, have remained a stain upon Wallace's image. In these repeated indictments of the Comyns, Bruce's most significant opponents, the influence of Brucean propaganda could not be more obvious.⁷⁶ Having co-operated with the English in driving Robert into exile, the Comyns proved ultimately unable to stem the tide of his growing acceptance and fled to England, allowing Robert to forfeit their Scottish lands and titles and to transfer these to his main supporters and friends. After Bannockburn, the Comyns continued to agitate the English court against him and secretly to cultivate friendships and alliances among the Scottish magnates; they would ultimately seek to restore themselves to their former status in Scotland by joining Edward Balliol, the son of King John, in his invasion of Scotland after Robert's death. Robert can have been only too aware of the continuing threat posed by the exiled Comyns, and of sympathisers who remained in Scotland, and perhaps the Wallace story of GA II reflects the attempts of his propagandists to tarnish Bruce's principal foes as much as possible. This may shed some light upon the sentence with which GA II concludes the Falkirk episode, that 'we seldom, if ever, read about the Scots being overcome by the English, unless through the envy of lords or the treachery and deceit of the natives'. This imprecation for unity may have been made by Bruce's 'false preachers' to serve as both a justification of Robert's own treatment of the 'treacherous' Comyns and as a warning to those who might support these exiles in the future, that in so doing they would be compromising the freedom of Scotland.

As mentioned above, there is one additional figure against whom GA II levels charges of treacherous conduct at Falkirk – none other than Robert Bruce himself:

It is commonly said that Robert Bruce, who afterwards was king of Scotland but then fought on the side of the king of England, was the means of bringing about this victory. For while the Scots stood invincible in their ranks ... this Robert Bruce went with one line, under Anthony Bek, by a long road round a hill, and attacked the Scots in the rear.⁷⁷

Robert's actual activities at this battle are not known for certain; Professor Barrow has portrayed him as having been firmly supportive of the

⁷⁵ F. J. Amours (ed.), *The Original Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun* (Scottish Text Society, 1907), v, 316.

⁷⁶ For a summary of the Comyn-Wallace relationship, see Young, *The Comyns*, 168–9.

⁷⁷ *Chron. GA II* (Skene), 101.

Scottish resistance from the outset until 1302, suggesting that Robert fought on the Scottish side at Falkirk and made his way to his earldom of Carrick when the battle was abandoned.⁷⁸ It certainly seems unlikely, in any event, that he would have been chosen guardian in the wake of such treachery, and we must doubt that a contemporary Scottish chronicle will have included this passage, while remaining certain that it was not adopted by the *GA II* chronicler from any text of Brucean propaganda. In fact, there would seem to be pro-Comyn bias in his description of the Scottish victory at Roslin a few chapters later, and there is little reason to doubt therefore that both there and in this passage regarding Bruce's alleged treason at Falkirk, we have indications that the sources for *GA II*'s account of the wars of independence period included not just pieces of Brucean, but also of pro-Comyn, propaganda.⁷⁹ Bruce, who was in Edward's camp after 1302, was one of the leaders of an English force that attacked and routed a force led by Wallace near Peebles in February 1304,⁸⁰ and this clash will have made the Falkirk accusation against Bruce that much more believable.

We have seen that the English chronicles, both northern and southern, were unanimous in their estimation of Wallace as having been a brigand or 'chief of brigands' at the outset of his career; the Lanercost chronicle refers to him as 'a certain bloody man',⁸¹ while Rishanger spoke of his 'low-birth and poor descent and education' and claimed that he had 'earned his livelihood with arrow and quiver', accusing the earl who knighted him of having made 'a swan from a raven'. It is interesting that in his opening statement regarding Wallace, the *GA II* chronicler remarks that he 'lifted up his head from his den (*latibulum*)', qualifying this statement with the word *quasi* ('as it were');⁸² it is possible that this is some kind of allusion to the 'chief of brigands' image of Wallace contained in the English chronicles, but it is also possible that a contemporary Scottish chronicle referred to Wallace's *latibulum* in line with the English observations that he was a robber and an outlaw, and that the author of *GA II* introduced *quasi* to undermine such a suggestion.

It is easy to appreciate the disdainful English estimations of Wallace's character. The grim details of the invasion of northern England late in 1297 lay at the centre of things, and not one of the English chroniclers fails to take notice of this event. The Lanercost chronicle describes how 'the Scots entered Northumberland in strength, wasting all the land, committing arson, pillage, and murder', did the same in the region of Carlisle, and then 'returned into Northumberland to lay waste more completely what they had left at first'.⁸³ Guisborough includes vivid

⁷⁸ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, 101–3, 109.

⁷⁹ *Chron. GA II* (Skene), 107–8.

⁸⁰ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, 142.

⁸¹ *Chron. Lanercost*, 190.

⁸² *Chron. GA II* (Skene), 98.

⁸³ *Chron. Lanercost*, 190–1.

descriptions of the terrified flight of the people and clergymen of this region, and implicates Wallace in the general burning and rapine by recording that while he was staying for two days at Hexham, he directed his army to scatter and undertake such activity.⁸⁴ Westminster's *Flores Historiarum* relates in its general estimation of Wallace that he was:

a robber, a wicked man, an arsonist and murderer, a looser of the cruelty of Herod and the furious rage of Nero's madness ... [who] collected many English men and women to promiscuously dance and play the lyre naked in front of him, [who] inflicted agonising torture with scorpions and the stings and crooked wounds of whips; who disembowelled crying infants in the cradle or else hanging at the breast; who burned young boys in great number in schools and churches.⁸⁵

It was perhaps his connection with such crimes, spelled out for the southern chroniclers in the record of his trial and experienced first hand by the northern observers, that convinced the English that Wallace was *infirmus progenie*.⁸⁶ *Gesta Annalia* II, on the other hand, although it tells us little about Wallace himself outwith its record of his deeds in 1297–98, states that he was 'wondrously brave and bold, of goodly demeanour, and of boundless liberality', and that 'though, among the earls and lords of the kingdom, he was looked upon as lowborn, yet his fathers rejoiced in the honour of knighthood', adding that he had an older brother who 'was girded with the knightly belt and inherited a landed estate, which was large enough for his station, and which he bequeathed as a holding to his descendants'.⁸⁷ We cannot know for certain how the chronicler came to know these details, and whether they represent some more contemporary and more reliable Scottish observation or amount to little more than a *riposte* on the part of the GA II chronicler, intended to contradict the 'chief of brigands' image of Wallace. *Scalacronica* would seem particularly informative in this regard, for Sir Thomas Gray seems to have entirely jettisoned the 'chief of brigands' view of Wallace's reprobate character, ignoring completely explicit reference to character and making use of Wallace for 'chivalrous' purposes instead, as an example of the breeding and the all-important qualities of loyalty, generosity, 'courtoisie' and justice which were central to the knightly ideal and the writing of 'chivalrous' history.⁸⁸ He will not have found his English sources entirely unhelpful in this regard; Guisborough had noted where Wallace – unexpectedly – spared the lives of two English clerics who had been brought to him to be cast (as usual) from the bridge at Perth to drown in the Tay,⁸⁹ along with his having spared and worked to protect the monastery of Hexham from harm,

⁸⁴ *Chron. Guisborough*, 304–6.

⁸⁵ Stevenson, *Wallace Docs.*, 27.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 8, 191–2.

⁸⁷ *Chron. GA II* (Skene), 98.

⁸⁸ Taylor, *English Historical Literature*, 157.

⁸⁹ *Chron. Guisborough*, 296.

while Rishanger had stated about Wallace that 'he fought bravely in many parts, as is usually the case with strong men, and strove as he could for the freedom of the Scots from the English'.⁹⁰ These small islands in the sea of English condemnation of Wallace must have seemed like treasure to Gray, but neither Guisborough nor Rishanger can have given him the impression that Wallace was anything but a false knight – a raven in swan's guise; it therefore seems possible that Gray had access to some Scottish material which described Wallace as having been a true knight with 'chivalrous' qualities, and this may suggest that the author of *GA* II was following the same source, or a similar one, in putting forward his estimation of Wallace's background and character.

Professor Cowan has identified 'an identity – or empathy – of attitude, mindset and behaviour which can be traced to the heady years of 1290–1320, which received its finest articulation in the Declaration of Arbroath and which also owed much to the inspirational legend of William Wallace'.⁹¹ It has been argued here that this complicity between the Declaration and the Wallace story was the result of deliberate manipulation on the part of the propagandists of Good King Robert, traces of which can be found in *GA* II, along with traces of other different source material. As a result of the work of the *GA* II chronicler, William Wallace emerges as a greatly significant figure with both a background and a character defined by respectability and a measure of knightly honour, set at odds with the 'chief of brigands' image enunciated by the chroniclers of England. Rather than having initially been a puppet of the magnates, or even being independent of them, the new orthodoxy placed Wallace at odds with them because they stood in his way of ensuring the freedom of Scotland, and to serve the end of this freedom he subdued them and took control of the kingdom. In so doing, he assured himself of the enduring enmity of the greatest of the magnates, which manifested itself ultimately in his betrayal and ruin. Through this outline of Wallace's career, Brucean propaganda moulded him into an exemplary precedent for Bruce himself, fabricated and utilised by them to exert an influence upon contemporary politics and public perceptions. The efforts of the 'false preachers' appear to have paid off, for by the time of Barbour's *Brus* Robert seems to have become such a popular hero in his own right that it was no longer necessary even to mention Wallace's name. Their manipulation of the William Wallace story would prove similarly powerful and enduring as *Gesta Annalia* II was taken up by Wyntoun and Bower and its image of Wallace proliferated and expanded. Although the compiler of *GA* II presumably intended only to set the record straight with respect to Wallace, in his reliance upon propaganda he achieved, in fact, the opposite result. Instead, he placed before his readers a story devised neither to give Wallace his due nor to set the record straight, but to strengthen and deepen the acceptability of

⁹⁰ Stevenson, *Wallace Docs.*, 8.

⁹¹ Cowan, 'Identity, freedom and the Declaration of Arbroath', 63.

Robert Bruce as hero and king. Not for the last time, the image of William Wallace became more important than the historical reality, and we are compelled to accept that Broun's perceptive reinterpretation of *Gesta Annalia* can unfortunately bring us no nearer the 'real' Wallace than had the established view of the work.